

February 6, 2007

Madam Chair and Senate Local Government Committee,

My name is Lynda Saul. I've been working in the field of watershed management in Montana for the last 20 years and have a M.S. in hydrology from University of Montana. I was appointed to the Governor's Task Force for Riparian Protection and I am here to speak in support of SB 345 on behalf of the Governor's Task Force.

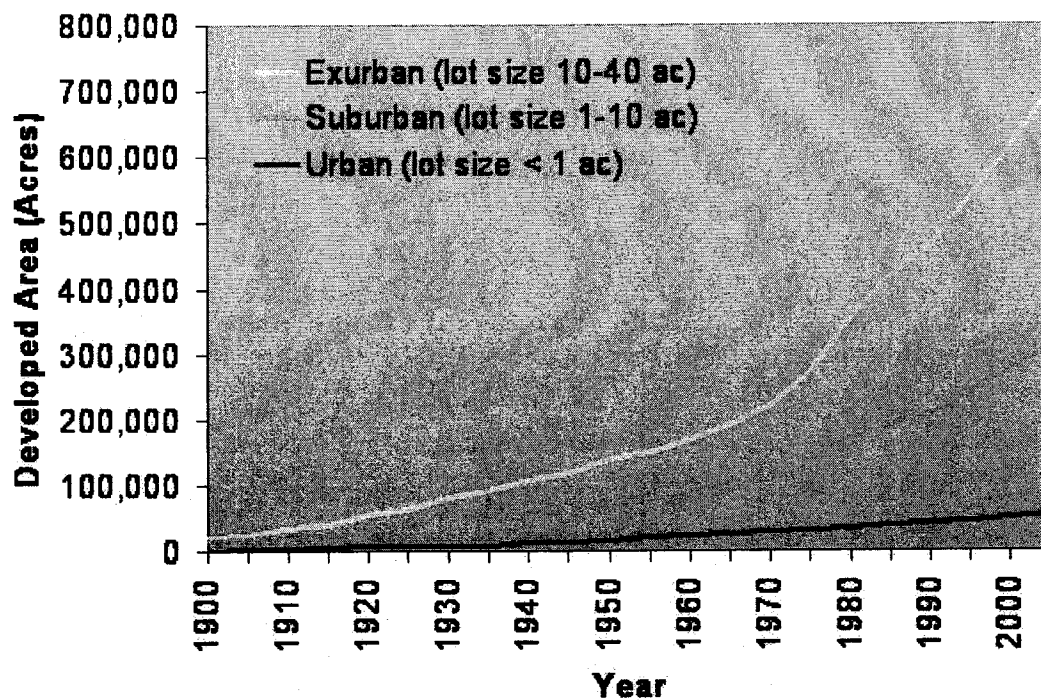
Almost a year ago, when Governor Schweitzer created this Task Force, he started his letter with this statement; "Development along rivers and streams that destroys protective riparian areas is possibly the most single urgent ecosystem threat facing Montana today. Not only do these waterways and riparian areas provide fish and wildlife habitat, they also provide jobs and recreation."

The Governor's Task Force for Riparian Protection also discovered that there are a number of common sense reasons to champion statewide stream setbacks, and chief among them is to keep Montana's water clean for communities, people, and for the fish and wildlife we all enjoy. In addition, the Task Force supports stream setbacks because:

- Good planning regulations offer Montana communities the tools they need to address the growth and development that is rapidly arriving.
- There is an urgency to this issue: the number of new subdivision lots reviewed by DEQ has increased 400% from 1990 to 2006 and Montana's fastest growth is in rural places near rivers, lakes, and forests.
- Setbacks are scientifically proven to filter and reduce nutrient and sediment pollutants to streams, lakes and wetlands and help protect drinking water and aquatic life.
- There is political support for stream conservation and clean water protection. Statewide 83% agreed or strongly agreed that, "It's important to me that wetland and riparian areas in Montana are conserved and protected". (6/2003 RMU Research Summary No 8.)
- There are economic benefits. Stream setbacks increase property values and provide economic benefits by reducing the need to combat flooding, repair eroding stream banks, and replace damaged property.
- Rivers, streams, and wetlands makeup less than five percent of Montana's landscape, yet contain 75 percent of the state's plant and animal diversity.
- Stream setbacks provide homeowners privacy from angles and floaters while protecting our traditional relationship with Montana's natural resources that makes Montana such an attractive place to live, work, visit, and play.
- Enjoyment of Montana for everyone depends on the future health of Montana's fish, wildlife and natural areas and setbacks preserve the natural characteristics and beauty of the stream for all to enjoy.
- Statewide stream set backs offer Montana an intelligent solution to preserve the Montana we know and love and level the playing field across local governments so all are preserving our heritage while growing wisely.

The Governor's Task Force for Riparian Protection encourages the Senate Local Government Committee to support SB 345.

Development Over Time in Western Montana



New subdivision lots reviewed by DEQ

